

## **RACIAL HARMONY FORUM**

**JUNE 3, 2002  
STOCKTON CIVIC AUDITORIUM  
525 NORTH CENTER STREET  
STOCKTON CALIFORNIA**

The Racial Harmony Forum began on the above date at 6:00 p.m.

### **MEMBERS PRESENT**

Sister Lois Silva, St. Joseph's Medical Center  
Rick Wentworth, San Joaquin County Superintendent of Schools  
Steve Farrar, Superintendent, Lincoln Unified School District  
Mark Lewis, City Manager, City of Stockton  
Frank Farrell, Greater Stockton Chamber of Commerce  
Bill Huyett, Superintendent, Lodi Unified School District  
Pastor Bob Hailey, Unity Southern Baptist Church/Metro Ministry  
Dennis Lee, President, Central Valley Asian-American Chamber of Commerce  
Scott Mitchell, Youth Advisory Commissioner  
George Ridler, Superintendent, Stockton Unified School District  
Willie Douglas, NAACP  
Gary Gillis, Chief, City of Stockton Fire Department

### **WELCOME**

Mayor Gary Podesto welcomed all and thanked all the school district representatives and the San Joaquin County Department of Education (SJCOE) for their participation in tonight's program.

### **OVERVIEW**

Dr. Mick Founts, Associate Superintendent, County Operated Schools & Programs, said that based on the last education forum, four major issues surfaced and it was decided to have community members talk to the educational leaders from the four major school districts in Stockton. The room has been divided into break-out sessions based on these issues. After the sessions, there will be a time for comments. The information will be compiled for review.

Dr. DeRossi announced that after the sessions, a panel consisting of Drs. Rick Wentworth, Steve Farrar, John Rieckewald, George Ridler, and Bill Huyett will answer questions. He asked that members of the groups write questions on index cards and turn them in to the group facilitator. The Mayor will then read the questions to the panel.

Addressing the Task Force, Mayor Podesto announced that he is trying to set a dates for two half-days in July for meetings to discuss issues brought up for a report in September. The next forum will be in September.

### **BREAKOUT SESSIONS**

- Curriculum/Textbook Adoptions/Frameworks  
Facilitator: Dr. Gary Dei Rossi, SJCOE Assistant Superintendent, Curriculum & Instruction
- Personnel Issues  
Facilitator: M. Allyn Bulzomi, SUSD Assistant Superintendent, Human Resources

- Student Discipline and Safety  
Facilitator: Dr. Mick Founts, SJCOE Associated Superintendent, County Operated Schools and Programs
- Student Success Programs/Culture/Language  
Facilitator: Rupert Asuncion, SUSD Director, Student Services

## **COMMUNITY COMMENTS**

Mayor Podesto announced that due to the time taken for the break-out sessions, comments would be limited to answering the questions submitted during the sessions. He thanked all City staff for their assistance in these meetings.

First question: How can districts improve the manner in which they encourage parent participation in successful programs, or parent participation in general?

Dr. Ridler said a problem that must be faced is working parents and the availability of school employees outside normal hours. There is a funded program to pay staff to participate in activities outside of the regular school day to encourage parent volunteerism in the schools. Each school has been asked to look at its ability to create such a program, which would be funded by the school district. Every school has a number of after-school programs, such as parents working on tutorials, school site councils, etc. He said that those who are involved are limited in number and programs have not been very effective. There is also a Parent Resource Center in the district to train parents to be effective advocates for children.

Dr. Huyett agreed with Dr. Ridler's comments, stating that parents have to be met where they are, and parents are at different stages of involvement with their children. It is sometimes difficult for a variety of reasons for parents to become involved with the schools. He said that many schools are doing home visits and this is a good trend. Parents with a greater involvement want to see systematic changes in schools, and in Lodi there are Advisory Committees where parents participate as partners in making decisions. This can be an effective way to show parents that they have an impact. He agreed that the schools must go where the parents are.

Dr. Rieckewald said that parents have to be made welcome. Manteca's biggest challenge is that so many parents commute to the Bay Area.

Mayor Podesto observed that about 70,000 people cross the Altamont into the Bay Area every day for work.

Second question: Why can't Stockton Police on Campus (SRO/School Resource Officers) conduct an orientation for parents to dispel the myths and explicitly clarify their roles on campus?

Stockton Police Chief Ed Chavez said that this is something that should be done. There are SROs in every school district at about 48 schools. The program was started about ten years ago at SUSD. He said that the role of the SRO is not necessarily enforcement but they can take enforcement action, although this is not their primary responsibility. He agreed that it is important to educate parents and students on the role of the SRO in their schools.

Third question: Where are the social service providers, psychologists, for each of the school sites?

Dr. Rieckewald said there is one assigned to every site but there is not one at each site. In Manteca, most of the school psychologists are providing support services for Special Education and on rare occasions referrals to other organizations. He said that Manteca also contracts with Central Valley Counseling for services at the elementary level.

Dr. Ridler agreed that most of their psychologists are involved in assessments for Special Education Services although there is a position used for placement in the GATE (Gifted and Talented Education) program at SUSD. There are not many psychologists in any of the school districts, and they provide very limited services outside of Special Education.

Dr. Huyett noted that Special Education is very demanding of psychologists' time in terms of assessing academic performances. He pointed out that most secondary schools and some elementary have counseling services as well.

Fourth question:           What programs are in place to prepare staff to work in a diverse workplace with diverse co-workers and diversity in the classroom, from administrators to all employees?

Dr. Huyett said there are not enough. There is a new, two or three-day training program that studies not only culture but also achievement, and barriers that may be present for different groups of students. He said there is difficulty in finding time for necessary staff development. The district has had anti-hate education and an anti-bullying campaign ongoing. For administrators, work is being done in studies of the frameworks of poverty to understand different values and barriers to impoverished students. He said that all districts encourage their teachers and administrators to go to the Museum of Tolerance in Los Angeles, a three-day training on cultural sensitivity and how language is used to disempower groups of people.

Dr. Ridler agreed that there are not enough programs for the reasons stated by Mr. Huyett – the availability of time and the contention for time between improving academic programs and the need to recognize students based on their learning styles and cultural issues. He said that two community liaisons have been hired from the District Office to make contact with the community and export those cultures back to administrators so they become more knowledgeable.

Dr. Farrar commented that the issues surrounding parental involvement, ethnicity of students and staff, and the cultures and languages they bring with them are very closely connected. Anything that can be done to engage the schools with families in a process of improving the manner in which we communicate and understand one another is going to help everyone. He said there is no shortage of good ideas and those that can be implemented in a coordinated, systematic manner should be used. One important thing is to improve the language development of staff, i.e., to learn key words and phrases of the major languages that represent the district.

Dr. Wentworth said that much of the professional development and training activities in districts is through County-operated programs, such as the 1969 effort to train teachers in cultural awareness. Legislation has been enacted to help with these efforts.

Fifth question:   How much are the various districts either spending or willing to spend on developing cultural awareness or cultural training for all staff?

Dr. Farrar said that while he does not have specific figures, every time someone is hired, money is spent on that process. Everything is done to engage the involvement of the community and build relationships with families and students. He said that this issue has been addressed by earlier speakers and every one sends administrators, staff, and sometimes PTA (Parent Teachers Association) presidents to diversity training across the country.

Dr. Huyett said that speaking in terms of money is not really the issue. There is plenty of money for staff development. The issue is finding the right programs, the time for them, and the commitment to them. He emphasized that staff development must be a sustained, systematic effort.

Dr. Ridler agreed that while the money is not an issue, they are short of time. Staff is being held accountable for raising student achievement and must learn what the standards are. Mr. Ridler said that

past programs have not been effective because there was no follow-up or time to work on the issues. He said that one must get past the idea of just tolerance and work on respect and appreciation.

Dr. Farrar agreed with both speakers, but stated that the issue is valuing “the covenant of our common humanity,” to be good to one another, and how one goes about doing that.

Sixth question: What are the criteria for moving from a temp, to a probationary, to a permanent employee? Seemingly Black teachers are taking longer to achieve permanent status.

Dr. Rieckewald responded that temps fill a position while someone is on leave. Probationary status is two years in California. By March of the second year, teachers automatically achieve tenure status if they move through the system, so the only reason not to advance is when a Prob I does not achieve Prob II, or if there is some problem with a Prob II's work and they are put on a work plan. He said that the process is in the Education Code and all districts must follow it.

Seventh question: How can a large district have viable parent involvement without parent/teacher conferencing?

Dr. Rider replied that some years ago there were funds in the budget for parent conferencing but money was taken out, so there is no formal way to pay teachers for doing more parent conferencing.

Dr. Rieckewald said that Manteca tries to get the parents of younger children involved early and they do parent conferencing with upper grade levels. He agreed that there is never enough time for this and the availability of parents is also an issue.

Eighth question: How successful are the senior projects among prospective graduates? What happens to those who don't have the nerve to present their projects?

Dr. Huyett said that they do senior projects in Lodi, and having observed them for the last couple of years he said that the students are doing a quality job. The senior project is a culminating activity where students have to do a research paper and do a presentation to a community panel. This is required for graduation. Those students who don't pass have a safety net. There are several opportunities to pass and the senior English teacher is in charge. Class size has been reduced in the senior year to support this. There is one opportunity to redo the presentation. He said that less than a dozen students have failed giving a speech. Students who fail to complete the other requirements go to summer school, after which they would receive their diplomas.

Dr. Rieckewald agreed that only a few students do not complete the project. Due dates are given for the outline portion, research, and information is built into the curriculum so that parents are aware. He added that even some Special Education students are doing a phenomenal job with their projects. He said that the projects bring to closure the skills that are being taught – research, communication, persuasion, and the ability to discuss issues and answer questions.

Dr. Ridler said that a school had requested to have the senior project program but SUSD would not do that until it was very clear how the safety nets would work. What is desired is to get students through school with their diplomas.

Mayor Podesto said that he participated at two senior projects, one as a judge and one to observe. He said the young people have done remarkable projects and have vast knowledge of their subject. He also stressed the importance of completing a project. He mentioned that he also panicked when speaking in public but did it because his school required it.

Ninth question: Why did a school district suspend a student for throwing a piece of candy?

Dr. Rieckewald said that if a student throws something in a classroom, this is inappropriate behavior, and, if it hits someone in the face, it could do damage. It would not be unreasonable to suspend a student who engaged in that type of activity.

Dr. Ridler said that the actual circumstances would have to be known. Decisions are made on what actually occurred.

Dr. Huyett said that sometimes parents don't realize that there is a due process for suspensions and schools must make this clear. The Education Code specifies that the parents have the right to appeal a suspension to the Principal and even to the Superintendent after the Vice Principal makes the decision.

Tenth question: Why isn't there more included in the history of Blacks than Booker T. Washington?

Dr. Ridler said that he had anticipated the question, and upon reviewing history books, and depending on the course being discussed, there is a huge amount of not just Black history but of other civilizations in a great deal of depth. Religious issues are covered; there are sections of textbooks that cover specific periods when a group is either struggling or at the forefront; and vignettes that talk about a specific contribution. He said that many cultures contribute to the country and the world and it is difficult to cover them all in depth. He said that the State of California has committees to select appropriate books and the schools then buy from specific lists. He noted that there are also celebrations of various cultures, including Black History month. The State mandates that the schools cover certain areas and provides the standards. He closed by stating that while not everyone will ever be entirely pleased, every effort is being made to be all-inclusive.

Dr. Rieckewald said that the curriculum presented and the textbooks purchased have been approved by the State of California and those frameworks dictate what must be done. Cultural events such as Cinco de Mayo and Black History Month are used to bring periods of times into focus and expand on what is in the textbooks.

Eleventh question:       What is the difference between a six-year-old who brought a Halloween knife to school and a six-year-old who brought a toy gun to school?

Dr. Farrar said that the Education Code is quite specific. If the toy gun looks real enough to be considered a replica; this is a major offense. A green squirt gun would clearly be a toy and would not merit the same status. On the other hand, if a knife can cut or poke, the State does not differentiate whether it is a metal blade or a plastic blade, but it must be a certain length to merit punishment.

Dr. Rieckewald agreed that the key difference is if it is a facsimile or a toy and this is quite easy to ascertain. A knife with a 3½ inch blade that could cut is a suspendable offense per the Education Code.

## **CLOSING**

Mayor Podesto thanked everyone for their participation.